"What Am I Doing to Be a Good Ancestor?": An Indigenized Phenomenology of Giving Back Among Native College Graduates

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Although giving back is consistently recognized as a goal of Native (Native Hawaiian, Native American, and Alaska Native) college students, little in the literature describes giving back in detail. To fill this gap, this research examines the essence of giving back as it is experienced by Native college graduates. It explores, through both Indigenous and phenomenological research methodologies, how Native college graduates come to value giving back, enact giving back, and make meaning of giving back. The findings from this study contribute to what is known about how Native college graduates may contribute to the self-determination of their nations and call for a reconceptualization of postsecondary success for Native peoples.

Statistics indicate that Native peoples across what is recognized as the United States, including Native Americans, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians (Kānaka 'Ōiwi), enroll in and complete higher education at low rates. In 2015, only 23% of American Indian and Alaska Native 18- to 24-year-olds were enrolled in college, in comparison with 40.5% of the total population of 18- to 24-year-olds (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016b). Among the cohort of students beginning college in 2008, only 41% of American Indian and Alaska Native students completed college

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within 6 years, as compared with 59.6% of the total population beginning college that year (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016a). Although Kānaka ‘Ōiwi constituted 23.5% of the 18- to 24-year-olds in Hawai‘i in 2010, they composed only 16.8% of the undergraduate population (Kamehameha Schools, 2014). In 2009, only 14.3% of Kānaka ‘Ōiwi aged 25 years and older had obtained a bachelor's degree or higher, in comparison with 41.7% of the population of Hawai‘i's non-Hispanic Whites (Kamehameha Schools, 2014). These dismal figures do not, however, adequately capture Native populations' interest in college enrollment and attainment (Brayboy, Fann, Castagno, & Solyom, 2012). Interest in attending college seemed to grow tremendously among Native youth within the past few decades. From 1980 to 2002, the proportion of Native 10th graders who expected to earn a bachelor's degree increased from 41% to 76% (Institute of Education Statistics, 2004). Moreover, in 2009, 84% of American Indian and Alaska Native eighth graders enrolled in public schools and Bureau of Indian Education schools reported that they planned to attend college either full- or part-time immediately after high school (Mead, Grigg, Moran, & Kuang, 2010).

Some scholars suggest that, through participating in higher education, Native students may engage in resistance, decolonization, nation building, and self-determination (e.g., Brayboy, 2005a; Brayboy, Castagno, & Solyom, 2014; Brayboy et al., 2012; Salis Reyes, 2014a, 2014b). This becomes possible when, in finding value in their connections to family and community members, both living and deceased, Native students imagine their academic successes as being not just individual but also communal (e.g., Brayboy, 2005a; Brayboy et al., 2012, 2014). In this case, though personal economic and social gains may not be devalued, they may not be the only or even the most important benefits of higher education (Pidgeon, 2008–2009). Rather, Native students might make their greatest impacts in using the knowledge, skills, and networks they have gained through education toward the betterment of their communities (Brayboy et al., 2012; Danziger, 1996; Pidgeon, 2008–2009). This kind of work is often described as "giving back."

The literature discusses giving back among Native peoples as an inherent value that stems from Native worldviews emphasizing relationships, reciprocity, and nationhood (Brayboy et al., 2012, 2014; Kupo, 2010; Shield, 2009; Wright, 2003). Several scholars (e.g., Chilisa, 2012; Meyer, 2008; Wilson, 2008) note that Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies emphasize the centrality of relationality, where wholeness and balance might be achieved through connections with other humans and nonhumans, both living and nonliving. Values of reciprocity, which undergird giving back, are linked to these understandings of relationality (Salis Reyes & Tauala, in press). As such, Native students are often motivated to attend college so that they might be better equipped to serve their communities (Brayboy, 2005b; Guillory, 2009; Huffman, 2011; Shield, 2009). This desire to give

back can be so strong as to drive them to stay in college even in the face of adversity (e.g., Brayboy, 2004; Drywater-Whitekiller, 2010). Recently, Lopez (2018) found that the desire to give back serves to predict both academic performance and persistence among Native college students. Yet, while giving back has been identified as an important aspect in the postsecondary experiences of Native students, the literature is limited in its exploration of how Native students maintain their interest in giving back, what forms giving back might take, and what giving back means to Native students, their families, and their communities.

Purpose of This Study

Recognizing these gaps in the literature, the purpose of this study is to learn in depth about how Native people experience and make sense of giving back. It is guided by one overarching research question: For Native college graduates, what is the nature of giving back? Four subquestions provided further guidance:

- How do Native college graduates come to value and choose to use their education as a means of giving back to Native people or communities?
- How do Native college graduates work in and cultivate careers aimed at giving back to Native people or communities?
- For Native college graduates, what is the significance of giving back in their own lives?
- For Native college graduates, what is perceived to be the significance of giving back to Native communities?

Literature Review

Acknowledging the strength that they receive from their cultural identities and community membership, many Native students believe it their responsibility to give back after graduating from college. Using the skills they have developed in college as a foundation, they seek to establish careers through which they will be able to serve their communities or other Native peoples in concrete ways (Brayboy, 2005b; Huffman, 2011; Shield, 2009). Joseph, a Native graduate from a Native-oriented teacher education program, brought this concept to light as he stated, "I will help them [my home community], because that's what we do. We help each other. They sent me here; they supported my efforts; they let me bring my children here; they knew I would come back" (as quoted in Brayboy et al., 2014, p. 584). Here, Joseph acknowledged the vital support that he received from his home community and declared his intention to return home and use the skills that he gained through his schooling to give back. He seemed to consider his decision to give back to be natural; it is just "what we do."

Indeed, the literature suggests that many Native students, as recipients of the love and care of their families and communities, believe in their own responsibility and privilege to give back (Kupo, 2010; Shield, 2009). In his study of college going among members of the Walpole Island First Nation in Canada, for example, Danziger (1996) found that the majority (62.5%) of participants felt duty bound to use the skills they gained through college for the benefit of their community. The literature further indicates that Native students have fulfilled their duty to give back through myriad ways, including breaking negative stereotypes of Native peoples, serving as role models for younger family and community members, and contributing to family and community survival (Drywater-Whitekiller, 2010; Guillory, 2008; Guillory & Wolverton, 2008).

Higher Education for Transformational Resistance

Brayboy (2005b) suggested that formal education, through transformational resistance, may be used as a tool by Native peoples to fight fire with fire in the war to protect their lives, cultures, and inherent rights to sovereignty. This work suggests that enrolling in college can provide Natives with the ability to give back to their communities in a unique way; it empowers Native students to combine school knowledge and traditional knowledge in efforts to protect and to contribute to the power of Native communities. From this frame of reference, academic success represents a means not only for the personal attainment of a career and financial independence but also for the maintenance of communal well-being (Brayboy, 2004; Fox, 2009). The extant literature, however, provides few examples of the ways in which giving back for transformational resistance and nation building can be carried out. It highlights Native college graduates' work to change the power dynamics between their tribes and local and federal governments through law (Brayboy, 2005b). While such work is important, it seems that there may be other ways by which Native college graduates can assist Native communities in taking back and making power (Smith, 2008). Drywater-Whitekiller's (2010) findings suggest that Native students in various academic fields have interest in giving back.

Giving Back as Moving Back?

Unfortunately, the literature to date also tends to limit discussion of giving back as a function of moving back to and finding work on reservations after graduation from college. Huffman (2011) found that coming from a reservation and planning to live on a reservation after college are both associated with a desire to use higher education as a means for serving Native peoples. Bosse, Duncan, Gapp, and Newland (2011) suggested that a college degree would provide Native college graduates, regardless of their choice of major, with the credentials they would need to find work back on their

reservation. Perhaps counter to this notion, though, other researchers called attention to the difficulty that some Native students have encountered in trying to find work on reservations. Job opportunities in specific fields can be extremely limited on reservations (Jackson, Smith, & Hill, 2003). Even when they are available, Native students who have gone away from home to attend school sometimes are made to feel that they are out of touch with their communities and, thus, cannot represent them legitimately (Brayboy, 2005b; Guillory, 2008; Jackson et al., 2003; Lee, 2009). While these findings are important, they still seem to provide only a myopic sense of what giving back could entail. The emphasis on giving back in reservation settings may be due in part to researchers' tendencies to relate having a Native worldview with coming from a reservation or rural tribal community (e.g., Huffman, 2001, 2008, 2011).

However, many Native peoples maintain a sense of Native identity even while living off reservations, including in urban settings (Brayboy et al., 2014; Goeman, 2009). In many ways, such ongoing connections defy colonization. The United States has a long and sordid history of attempting to terminate Native peoples through forcible removals from their ancestral homelands. Goeman (2009) explained that "relocation was not only about a movement of bodies off reservation, but also about respatializing a consciousness and relationship to land or mapping space as settler places" (p. 173). In other words, removal was as much about colonizing Native minds as it was about claiming Native places. However, even when relocation aimed to sever the ties between Native peoples and Native lands, Native peoples resisted. Goeman (2008, 2009) suggested that, though their relationships with the land has changed in some ways over time, Native peoples have nevertheless continued to find meaning in ancestral and familial stories grounded by place. In urban centers, they have also developed a new sense of community and place through reaching out to extended networks of friends and distant relatives in mutual support and solidarity (Goeman, 2009). Indeed, Goeman (2008, 2009) argued that Indigenous senses of place are not fixed, especially not in the way that colonial legal fictions might claim them to be. So, while land and place may be central to Indigenous identities and Indigenous survivance (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Goeman, 2008), Native peoples' connections to and understandings of place can be complex. Given this complexity, it seems important to explore whether or not and how giving back might be conceived of as occurring both within and outside ancestral homelands by Native people who have been raised both within and outside their ancestral homelands.

The Role of Curriculum in Reinforcing Giving Back

As giving back is valued in Native communities, it is also important to consider how it may be encouraged among Native students, even if they

may already enter the academy with an inherent desire to give back. The literature suggests that curriculum may play a role in this. On this, Champagne (2004) offered,

> Native students need to learn more about their own histories and cultures from the perspectives of their own communities. This learning experience should be a critical element for any Native student, not only to value education and help see its value and relation to community, but also to help develop values and skills necessary to work in the community and assist in its efforts to preserve itself and wisely adopt change that suits its long-term interests. (n.p.)

Adding to how this might be accomplished, Lee (2009) explained that a curriculum shaped by an Indigenous educational philosophy and critical pedagogy may be used in the transformation of educational systems and the creation of social change toward Indigenous end goals, including that of community well-being. In her 2009 work, she found that Native American studies motivates students to pursue goals related to Indigenous issues, people, and communities by reinforcing and validating their commitment to their communities, strengthening their Native sense of identity, helping them to build relationships with Native communities, helping them to decolonize their minds, helping them to see their own value, and inspiring them to be community activists. In a similar vein, Wright (2003) found that Hawaiian studies provides opportunities for decolonization and self-discovery for Kānaka ʻŌiwi students. It politicizes them and provides them with the support they need to envision their roles in contributing to the Hawaiian Nation. Still, while this research offers specific examples of how Native studies programs inspire Native students to give back to their Native nations, further research that highlights how other types of instructional and programmatic endeavors within the academy support or hinder Native students' desire to give back is also needed.

Contributions of the Current Study

Giving back might be conceived of as something natural in Native communities, something that "we just do" (Brayboy et al., 2014). Perhaps for that reason, the concept of giving back seemed ubiquitous in almost all of the literature cited above. Yet giving back served as the central phenomenon of interest in only one other study (Guillory, 2008). Through his dissertation research, Guillory (2008) explored how recent graduates, experienced workers, and respected elders defined giving back as well as what they perceived to be the rewards and struggles of giving back. Most of the participants were members of tribes in the Pacific Northwest and the Midwest and had grown up in reservation settings. Although Guillory found some differences in the ways these recent graduates, experienced workers, and respected elders understood giving back, some commonalities included that the participants

felt obliged to give back, that they linked giving back to their tribal communities and cultures, and that giving back was simultaneously rewarding and taxing. More specifically, they struggled with decisions to live in or apart from their tribal communities and with feeling distrusted or slighted by others when they decided to move home (Guillory, 2008).

Reflecting on Guillory's (2008) study along with other extant literature, it appears that there is still much to learn about the forms and meaning that giving back can take within Native contexts. In this study, I investigate what lies at the heart of giving back among Native college graduates who represent various Native nations, educational and professional fields, and even connections to place. I will come to this essence through examining how participants experience giving back along with how they make sense of these experiences. Even if giving back is something that Native peoples just do (Brayboy et al., 2014), this is perhaps what makes giving back within Native contexts so powerful and beautiful. Through this study, I highlight giving back as a strength of Native peoples, one that could and should be encouraged and built upon through cooperation among Native families, Native nations, and the academy.

Conceptual Framework

For this study, I utilized theories that emerged from and shed light on Indigenous experiences and knowledge: tribal critical race theory (TribalCrit) (Brayboy, 2005a), Kānaka Maoli critical race theory (KanakaCrit) (Salis Reyes, 2017), and Indigenous critical pedagogy (e.g., Grande, 2008; Salis Reyes, 2014b; Smith, 1999). All three strands of theory acknowledge the crushing pervasiveness of colonialism. Although both TribalCrit and KanakaCrit may have roots in critical race theory, they emphasize the intercentricity and normativity of *colonialism* rather than *racism* in society. Within the United States, colonization (and occupation in the case of Hawai'i [Salis Reyes, 2017]) has upheld European American knowledge, power, and wealth through the subjugation of Indigenous bodies, minds, and spirits (Grande, 2008; Meyer, 2008). Colonization has sought to remove Native peoples from lands and resources that could be commodified for the benefit of the American empire through genocide and the eradication of our ancestral knowledge and lifeways. Racism is but one manifestation of this all-encompassing colonization. Thus, any efforts made to uphold Indigeneity can be understood as acts of resistance contributing to Indigenous power, which, according to TribalCrit and KanakaCrit, is inherently tied to our[1] rights to self-determination and sovereignty. Indigenous critical pedagogy (e.g., Grande, 2008; Meyer, 2003, 2008; Salis Reyes, 2014b; Smith, 1999) further argues that education offers key sites for such Indigenous resistance. It suggests that, within educational spaces, Native peoples can seek to recognize how colonialism has shaped our experiences, to (re)conceptualize our pasts

through a Native lens, to (re)assert the value of Native ways of knowing, and to develop new ways of knowing that will empower Native peoples to live within the contemporary world while still anchored by the beliefs and understandings of our ancestors (Grande, 2008, Smith, 1999). Through using education for our own means and purposes, Native peoples can begin to heal from the enduring inflictions of colonialism (Grande, 2008; Smith, 1999).

As a conceptual framework, TribalCrit (Brayboy, 2005a), KanakaCrit (Salis Reyes, 2017), and Indigenous critical pedagogy (e.g., Salis Reyes, 2014b; Grande, 2008; Meyer, 2008; Smith, 1999) together suggest why this study is important, shape this study's research questions, dictate how this study should be carried out methodologically, and provide this study's analytical lens. From the vantage point of this framework, higher education can provide Native peoples both with a space for resistance against colonialism and with capital that may be turned toward Native sovereignty and survivance, which involves an ongoing presence through resistance to erasure (Vizenor, 2008). When Native college graduates give back, they effectively draw bridges between education and self-determination.

This interwoven framework also points to appropriate methodological approaches for this study. TribalCrit (Brayboy, 2005a) and KanakaCrit (Salis Reyes, 2014a) both emphasize the power of stories among Native peoples. Stories provide the foundations for Native nations (Brayboy, 2005a). So (re)learning and (re)telling our (hi)stories allow us to know ourselves better as peoples. It empowers us to move into the future while keeping some footing in our pasts (Salis Reyes, 2014a). It follows that, in research, stories comprise real, legitimate data (Brayboy, 2005a). This interwoven framework then has helped me to choose a methodological approach—Indigenized phenomenology—that honors the integrity of Indigenous stories and lived experiences. This is vital because the stories that Native college graduates share of their efforts to give back have the power not only to work against master narratives that misunderstand Native peoples but also to offer knowledge that contributes to our collective betterment.

Last but not least, this interwoven conceptual framework helped provide the analytical lens for this study. Through this lens, I sought to understand the participants' experiences with regard to how they might relate to colonialism, assimilation, and inequity, on one hand, and to self-determination, sovereignty, and social justice, on the other. In other words, I have sought to understand the participants' experiences in light of the relationships of power that have both impacted and been impacted by them. Insights regarding Indigenous knowledges and cultures are vital to this analysis. Taken together, TribalCrit (Brayboy, 2005a), KanakaCrit (Salis Reyes, 2014a), and Indigenous critical pedagogy (e.g., Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Grande, 2008; Meyer, 2003, 2008; Salis Reyes, 2014b; Smith, 1999) seem to indicate that different communities may envision self-determination and sovereignty as taking different forms. Thus, this framework has directed me to understand the

participants' experiences of giving back with their knowledge of self, family, and community in mind.

Methodology

I employed both phenomenological and Indigenous research methodologies in this study. In bringing phenomenological and Indigenous methodologies in dialogue and creative tension with each other, I aimed to cultivate multidimensional, multiperspectival research that would attend to the complexity of giving back as a social phenomenon within Native contexts (Saukko, 2003). Recognizing how research has historically been used as a colonizing tool (Smith, 1999), I also strove to decolonize/Indigenize my research by questioning how research paradigms and practices privilege Western ways of knowing and by reconstructing these paradigms and practices so that they would resonate more with Indigenous ways of knowing (Chilisa, 2012).

At its most basic level, phenomenology assumes that knowledge and truth lie in everyday lived experiences (Chilisa, 2012). Thus, to get to knowledge and truth, the goal of phenomenology is to uncover and to describe the internal meaning structures or essence of a lived experience or phenomenon (van Manen, 1990). Such a belief aligns well with this study's conceptual framework. Brayboy (2005a) explained that, in part because they value experiential knowledge as a means of informing thinking and research, TribalCrit and other branches of critical race theory underscore narratives, testimonies, and/or stories as vital sources of data.

A phenomenological sense of knowing seems most divergent from Indigenous ways of knowing, however, in its emphasis on the ego as the source of rational understanding. Borrowing from Cartesian conceptions of self and knowing, Husserl, often considered the father of phenomenology, imagined the self as an intuitive-thinking being who doubts, affirms, imagines, and understands (Husserl, 1970; Moustakas, 1994). The self can come to know clearly by transcending his or her assumptions through the intuitive-reflective process of the epoché (Husserl, 1970). These phenomenological beliefs in the individual as the sole source of understanding and in the possibility of transcendental objectivity seem almost wholly misaligned with Indigenous ways of being and knowing. Chilisa (2012) explained that Indigenous research is often guided by relational ontologies, epistemologies, and axiologies. From this perspective, researchers gain knowledge not through a retreat to the ego but through their understanding and appreciation of relationships, those between themselves and what/who is being researched. Thus, in this study, I aimed to come to a deeper understanding of the meaning structure of giving back through recognition of (not distancing from) my perspectives, biases, and relationships.

Positionality

The topic of giving back resonates with my own experiences and my identity as a Kanaka higher education scholar who hopes to benefit Kānaka ʻŌiwi and, more broadly, Native communities through my work. I began this study with a belief in the vitality of Indigenous wisdoms and lifeways. Moreover, I began this study believing that the perpetuation of this vitality rests in the hands of those of us who choose to give back in whatever form we can. In this way, I was and continue always to be inextricably tied to this research. Indeed, as Tengan (2005) suggested, detachment may not be a luxury that Indigenous researchers can claim. Thus, I engaged in self-reflection not to attempt to transcend my assumptions and come to a pure understanding of giving back but to realize my own relationships with the research and to consider how best to work through these relationships in order to come to the most robust understanding of the experience of giving back.

My own subjectivities affected my research decisions and practices in myriad ways. For instance, while the literature pertaining to Native peoples in higher education directed me to the need for this research, I might not have recognized this need if the concept of giving back had not resonated with my own experiences. Through my previous involvement in the Native student community at Stanford University, I developed lifelong friendships with several peers who hoped that they would be able to use their education in ways that would serve the interests of Native peoples. As time has gone by, I have watched with admiration and pride as many of these friends have made these goals come to fruition through their passion and hard work. I came to study giving back then not just because I wanted to fill a void in the literature but because I believed that there was strength in giving back and that there was much to learn from those who lived their lives giving back.

Through my own life, I have also come to see giving back as being tied to relationships and responsibilities. I chose to enter the field of higher education in many ways to honor the gifts that have been given to me through my life. A great number of people, perhaps most importantly my parents, have invested in and contributed to my educational journey. Without that support, I am not sure that it would have been possible for me to become the first on my father's side of the family to complete a college degree. As such, I entered the field of higher education with the hope of empowering other students from Indigenous and racially and ethnically minoritized backgrounds along their own postsecondary pathways. In other words, since relationships sustained me along my educational journey, I hoped to maintain accountability to these relationships by giving to future generations. While studying giving back, this knowledge has guided me to explore the relationships that my participants share with others. In gaining an understanding of these relationships, I tried to better understand what has

motivated my participants to give back. Such knowledge also helped me understand to whom my participants hope to give back and for what purposes.

Through my experiences, I have also come to believe that giving back may take on different forms and that it might be most impactful and meaningful when a person uses his or her greatest gifts to give back. For example, while I chose to enter the professoriate because I believed that I had much to give through my research and teaching, I have known others who have worked to make their impacts in fields such as medicine, engineering, the arts, and community organizing. For this reason, in this research, I sought participants who gave back through a variety of means and career fields. In doing so, I tried both to contribute to an expanded view of the forms that giving back can take and to find common threads of giving back within the diversity of these career fields and actions. I also asked the participants about the impacts that giving back has made in their own lives as well as the impact they hoped to make in the lives of others through their work. I asked too how they came to decide to give back in the ways that they have chosen. Though my assumption was that my participants would use their strengths as a means of giving back, I listened for other experiences as well.

Participants

I used purposeful sampling (Hays & Singh, 2012) to seek out participants who have experienced the phenomenon of giving back and are interested in understanding its importance. The participants met the following criteria:

- They self-identified as Native Hawaiian (Kānaka ʻŌiwi), Native American, and/ or Alaska Native.
- They currently do work that they intend to benefit Native people or communities.
- They have completed an associate's or higher degree.
- They were at least 18 years of age.
- They had access to a computer and the Internet.

These criteria helped to bring me into conversation with participants who have lived giving back in ways that are in line with what I aimed to study. The requirement that a participant must identify as Native reflected my understanding that giving back involves doing something for a community with which one personally identifies. The requirement that a participant must purposefully do work that in some way serves Native people or communities highlighted my belief that giving back must be done intentionally. This was important as my conceptual framework emphasizes that Indigenous people must take an *active* stance in order to work against colonization and toward survivance (e.g., Brayboy, 2005a; Grande, 2008; Salis Reyes, 2017; Smith, 1999; Vizenor, 2008). However, the requirement did

not limit giving back to taking place within certain areas or career fields. Rather, it allowed for participants to identify their own work as giving back. Finally, the requirement that a participant must have earned an associate's degree or higher allowed me to consider ways in which higher education may be used toward giving back. This requirement was intimately tied to my interests as a higher education researcher. Whereas discourses surrounding higher education suggest that postsecondary degrees contribute primarily to personal gains (Saunders, 2014), my research highlighted the communal gains associated with postsecondary completion.

In the end, 11 men and women, who represented a broad array of Native communities, educational backgrounds, and career fields, participated. I asked them to choose whether they wanted to be identified by pseudonyms or by their own names, so that knowledge could be attributed to them and to their relations. See Table 1 for a full list of the participants.

Data Collection

Data were collected primarily through one-on-one interviews. Each interview lasted between 45 minutes and 2 hours. Salmons (2014) suggested that information and communication technologies may provide researchers and participants with a convenient way to interface with one another even when they are geographically dispersed. In this study, because the participants were located across the country, all the interviews were conducted through the use of video chat technology. Video chats were preferred over phone interviews for their ability to make participants' body language and facial expressions visible. As in traditional face-to-face interviews, such visibility contributed to my efforts to build a rapport with the participants and to collect robust data (Salmons, 2014).

Because the interviews were conducted across geographic distances, this meant that my participants and I communicated with one another while in distinct physical contexts from one another. The benefit of this was that my participants and I were able to choose the spaces in which we felt most comfortable for the interview; this helped to facilitate positive experiences for all involved (Gruber, Szmigin, Reppel, & Voss, 2008). This was especially important for this phenomenological study because "people are more inclined to remember and tell life stories when the surroundings are conducive to thinking about these experiences" (van Manen, 2014, chap. 11, "The Phenomenological Interview, para. 3).

Data Analysis

In phenomenological research, data are analyzed primarily through two overarching processes, the epoché and the reduction. According to Moustakas (1994), the epoché entails a process of deep self-reflection through which researchers may set aside their biases and preconceived ideas

Table 1
Participant Information

Name	Native Community Affiliation/Identity	Educational Background	Position(s) for Giving Back
Troy Anderson	Coquille	BA, Linguistics MA, Anthropology MBA, Business	Tribal linguist
Nikki Borchardt Campbell	Southern Paiute/Northern Ute	MA and JD	Executive director of the National American Indian Court Judges Association
Allison Empey	Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde	MD	Pediatrician
Genny Giaccardo	Pueblo of San Felipe	MCRP	Senior advisor for tribal relations
Leilani Kupo	Kanaka Maoli	BA, English MA, Counseling Psychology PhD, Higher Education Administration	Director of Women's Resource and Research Center at University of California–Davis
Noa Kekuewa Lincoln	Native Hawaiian	PhD, Ecology	Assistant professor in Indigenous Crops and Cropping Systems at University of Hawaiʻi–Mānoa
Robert Marquez	Chihene Nde	BA, Mechanical Engineering MA, Analytical Chemistry PhD, Sustainability	Researcher and R&D Director of iCATIS
Tᵃ	Large Native Nation of Oklahoma	AA BA MSW	Director of social work for Large Native Nation of Oklahoma
Keopulaulani (Keʻōpū) Reelitz	Part-Hawaiian	BA JD	Public information officer of Hawaiʻi Department of Human Services
Jarrid Whitney	Six Nations Cayuga	EdM, Education	Executive director of Admissions and Financial Aid
Tesia Zientek	Citizen Potawatomi Nation	BA, English MA, Education Policy, Organization, and Leadership Studies	Education director of CPN

Note. The participants' own descriptions of their Native community affiliations and identities as well as of their educational backgrounds are used above.
ᵃPseudonym.

so that they may look at the phenomenon of interest through naive, pure eyes. To engage in the epoché, I took time to identify my attitudes with regard to my Kānaka Maoli and Native identities, the value of education, and the importance of giving back. However, approaching this work through an Indigenous perspective, I reflected on these attitudes not to separate myself from them but to consider how they have impacted my research choices. I also was mindful of the relationships that I built with my participants and with what I learned through their stories (Brayboy, 2005a; Wilson, 2008). Reflective writing was key through these processes.

I further engaged in the reduction as a means of uncovering a meaning structure of giving back. Through the reduction, data are reduced until the essence of a phenomenon is revealed (Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 1990). This process involves the horizonalization of data, such that each experience is considered in its singularity and is given equal value; the creation of meaning units from these horizons; the clustering of meaning units into themes; and the development of complete textural descriptions of each theme. As I (re)listened to each interview and (re)read each transcript, I looked to all of the participants' shared thoughts as potential horizons on the experience of giving back (Moustakas, 1994). I also used first- and second-cycle coding methods to organize and configure these horizons into meaning units (Moustakas, 1994). Finally, I reviewed these meaning units again and clustered those that seemed central to the phenomenon of giving back into themes (Moustakas, 1994). This analytical process was much more recursive than it was linear (Hays & Singh, 2012), and it laid the groundwork for me to develop textural descriptions of giving back (van Manen, 1990; Moustakas, 1994). Writing was also a key process in the reduction (van Manen, 1990).

Findings

Borrowing from van Manen (1990), my goal was to uncover the essences that make giving back from Native perspectives what it is. In the end, through this study, I found the meaning structure of giving back to be composed of six themes: (1) giving back informs the worldview; (2) it takes place at the intersection of passion, expertise, and opportunity; (3) it is simultaneously a privilege, responsibility, gift, and burden; (4) it is about building and nurturing relationships; (5) it involves considerations of place; and (6) it is intended to ensure community survivance.

According to van Manen (1990), "themes are the stars that make up the universe of meaning we live through. By the light of these themes we can navigate and explore such universes" (p. 90). In the following section, I describe these themes, these stars, in the hope that together they allow the meaning structure, the constellation, of giving back to shine brightly and reveal its shape.

How We See the World: Giving Back Informs Worldview

Giving back integrally informed the worldviews of the participants in this study. Every day, they thought about and/or practiced giving something of themselves to others who could use the support. This is because they felt closely connected to others around them. They learned to value giving back through others' examples and through practice. T, who serves as the director of social work for her tribe in Oklahoma, for example, spoke in admiration of her grandparents. She believed that her grandparents gave in many ways. They helped to raise her. Her grandfather also served in two wars, which T believed was the ultimate sacrifice. In T's eyes, it seemed that there was nothing too big or too small for her grandparents to offer. Thinking back on her grandparents' efforts to organize and participate in community dances, she reflected,

> My grandpa would see someone having a hard time and looking for a seat. If he had a seat right there in front of him, he would just get up and say, "Here, do you want a seat?" It was just little things like that that you saw and thought, "Okay, that's what you're supposed to do."

These types of lessons seemed to be further cultivated through embodied experiences. Keʻōpū Reelitz, who identifies as part-Hawaiian and works as the public information officer of the Hawaiʻi Department of Human Services, for example, spoke of how her parents expected that she would lend a hand as needed at family and community gatherings.

> It sounds silly, but even my dad was a part of a hālau[2] [house of hula instruction and practice], and you go to the hālau parties, and as soon as the kūpuna [elders] start cleaning up, it was just expected, the kids just jump up and go help.

Keʻōpū's parents had taught her at a very young age how to read and respond to cues for when help was needed. She quickly learned that she should "jump up and go help" whenever it was needed. It was something that her family did together regularly, including through volunteering.

As the value of giving back became further integrated into the participants' worldviews, it seemed to become impossible for them to think of living life any other way. On this, Uncle Robert Marquez, who identifies as Chihene Nde and is the research and development director of iCATIS (International Centers for Appropriate Technology and Indigenous Sustainability, http://www.icatis.org), a nonprofit organization that brings sustainable and environmentally responsible technologies into Indigenous and other impoverished communities, noted that giving back is a process that is ongoing and never-ending. As such, it is something that is practiced constantly:

> The way you develop it [giving back] is like anything else. That is, the more you do it, the easier it is. When you do things very little, it's a big challenge because you don't really understand. If you do it all the time, it's just a part of every cycle. A part of everything that you do.

Thus, the participants approached higher education as they did everything else in life, with an interest in giving back. Nikki Borchardt Campbell, who identifies as Southern Paiute and Northern Ute and serves as the executive director of the National American Indian Court Judges Association, for example, reflected,

> It [whether or not I would give back] wasn't something that I thought about. It wasn't even like it was really a question of whether I would give back. It was just a question of *how* I would give back, how I would either return to my own community or how I would give back to Indian country in general.

The participants reflected on giving back as if it had never been a choice they have had to make. Because giving back was a central value to them, they were driven by it. They did not know what it would be like not to give back. This perspective extended into every aspect of their lives, including their education. Thus, their journeys through education, for the most part, were not about whether they should give back. Instead, through their journeys, they hoped to discover what paths they should take toward giving back.

Finding Our Pathways: Giving Back Takes Place at the Intersection of Passion, Expertise, and Opportunity

The participants seemed to feel called to do their work to give back. They came to this work through following their passions, recognizing their areas of expertise, and finding or, in some cases, creating the right opportunities.

Following Passions

Participants talked about falling into their lines of work or venues for giving back as they began to realize what it was that they loved doing or that they cared most about. They trusted what felt right and allowed that gut knowledge to guide them. To this end, Keʻōpū stated,

> I always felt, especially when I would come home or I would hear of stuff going on, there was this reignition of fire. Like 'Yeah, this is why I am doing it. This energizes me.' I would feel energy when I was able to give back.

Other participants discussed how the fire they felt in giving back energized them to work long hours or to persist in giving back in the face of obstacles.

In this regard, Tesia Zientek, who has worked as a contracts and grants coordinator as well as an education director for her tribe, the Citizen Potawatomi Nation (CPN), described her feelings in working for her tribe:

> I can tell when I'm working on a project in my current job, when it's very clear to me how that reflects my values and my passion because I don't mind [laugh] staying up very late to work on it or spending hours outside of eight to five working on it. I can see how my passion makes it a lot easier.

The passion that the participants felt for their work seemed to give them the energy they needed to work long hours to complete the tasks at hand. Somehow the clock ceased to become an issue when they loved what they were doing and knew that it was important work that needed to get done.

Developing Expertise

Also vital to the participants' experiences of giving back were processes of building and harnessing specific areas of expertise. Building these areas of expertise is vital because, as Uncle Robert phrased it, "You have to develop some skills. If you have no skills, then you're not going to be good to anybody else." Many participants sought further higher education to develop skills that they felt could be applied toward addressing specific needs in the communities they cared about. Allison Empey, who is a member of the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde and works as a pediatrician, for example, discussed how her medical training prepared her for taking on different forms of work in her community, including

> one, helping with bringing back programs that are working; two, actually working with my tribe and being a practitioner out of the tribe. And three, from the advocacy component, I think there's a lot of things that I could do as well.

In other words, her training did not prepare her only for the everyday tasks of seeing patients. It also gave her knowledge of best practices that could be adopted and adapted to serve the needs of her tribe on a broader level as well as a platform from which she could advocate for the health-related needs of her tribe.

Taking and Making Opportunities

Yet, while passion and expertise were vital to the participants' efforts to give back, they could not ultimately harness their passion or expertise toward giving back without being afforded the right opportunities to do so. Opportunities, or even the lack of opportunities in certain areas, often affected the kinds of impacts that the participants could make and

determined whether they would aim to serve specific communities or a broader Indigenous community. Jarrid Whitney, who is Six Nations Cayuga and works as an executive director of Admissions and Financial Aid, for example, discussed how following opportunities in the field of higher education eventually led him away from his home community but still allowed him to do work with people across diverse Native communities:

> It wasn't until the Dartmouth job opened up specifically dealing with Native recruitment that I started thinking bigger picture about Native communities and communities overall. Because, again, growing up in Upstate New York and basically never leaving Upstate New York, I knew about other tribes, but I honestly didn't know anything about the different cultures. When I got to Dartmouth, it was a mind blow because my job was to recruit on different reservations for nine weeks every fall. Right there, I got to know different communities and different people. There were a lot of similarities, of course, but so many differences too, which I'd never known before.

Though Jarrid did not necessarily know in the beginning that he would have a passion for working across Indian country, this opportunity in his field helped him realize it. From this early job, he cultivated a career dedicated to providing higher education access to students and their families from Native nations across the continent as well as in Hawai'i.

Ultimately, the participants seemed to voice the greatest fulfillment in doing work that engaged both their passions and their expertise. It was when both passions and expertise were engaged that the participants were able put their greatest efforts into giving back. However, before they could begin this work, they needed the opportunities to do so.

Feeling Supported, Supporting Others: Giving Back Is a Privilege and a Responsibility, a Gift and a Burden

Participants spoke of giving back as a privilege, responsibility, gift, and burden simultaneously. They talked about having been given many privileges in their lives, including the privilege to attend college. Because they had been privileged, they felt it their responsibility to use what they had gained through their education to help others. The weight of this responsibility sometimes felt burdensome. They knew that they could not fail. Along these lines, Jarrid reflected,

> I needed to graduate because my family was putting their resources in to make sure I went to a school like that [Cornell University], even though they never had that opportunity. I felt an indebtedness to my family that I had to do well.

Because their families and others had invested in their education, the participants felt as though their education no longer belonged just to them. They

felt responsible to use what they had gained through their education either directly in service to their families and communities or toward making further investments that would do their families and communities proud. They felt it vital that the investments that had been made in them not go to waste. Thus, the burden of their responsibility was that they did not feel free to make decisions even about their own career trajectories without considering how these decisions might also contribute to the familial or communal good. They also were not free to give up in the face of adversity.

Often, the participants used what they believed to be their gifts, those special talents that they had been born with and/or that they had honed over time, toward giving back. They also used the authority and networks that they had gained through their education in the service of others. Noa Lincoln, who identifies as Native Hawaiian and works as a faculty member of Indigenous Crops and Cropping Systems at the University of Hawaiʻi at Mānoa, for example, explained why and how he leveraged his degree and the social capital that he gained through his graduate education:

> I think just going through that academic education opens a lot of doors that you can then use to do all sorts of things, including giving back. I've written dozens and dozens of grant applications for local communities and organizations to get them money to do projects they want to do in their home communities. I promise you, without being . . . able to throw out these names and letters behind your name, that a lot of those wouldn't have come through.

While Noa did not believe that his formal education was necessarily his greatest asset, he realized that it was highly valued by society at large. With this in mind, he used his academic pedigree as a means for opening doors to opportunities and resources that would otherwise be closed to people in his community. In a similar vein, Leilani Kupo, who identifies as Kanaka Maoli and has built a career in student affairs, discussed how, while she did not care to showcase her credentials upfront, she sometimes felt that she had to highlight those three letters at the end of her name just to be taken seriously in the making of institutional policies and practices. She valued her PhD for what it meant for her family and her community and resented that she had to prove her intelligence and authority to other institutional leaders by touting it for all to see. Yet Leilani knew that things were the way they were in many ways because Kānaka Maoli and other Indigenous voices have largely been left out of institutional decision-making processes. Thus, she felt a responsibility to step in and be heard in such arenas:

> It's the responsibility of people like me to try to leverage the access that I have. That's why it's important for folks, or for me at least, to utilize that and to acknowledge my privilege and my positionality as well, that I have tremendous privilege and positionality being in

> the spaces that I'm in. I have to be aware of that as well as be cautious, because I can also do damage within the community.

Leilani knew that, because she had the access through her PhD, she had to be willing to sit at the proverbial decision-making table. She had to be willing to be a voice for her community and perhaps for other marginalized communities. She believed that she could do something good for her community this way but also recognized that she had the power to do wrong. She knew that she had to approach her work with great care.

The last phrase in Leilani's last comment hints at the burden the participants shouldered in their efforts to give back. While they believed that they could make positive impacts for their communities through the work that they did, they also worried that, if they did not get things quite right, their efforts had the potential to hurt their communities. This proved a heavy responsibility for the participants to bear. The nature of giving back is thus quite complex. In giving back, there is a dualism. A privilege is at once understood as a responsibility. A gift is at once understood as a burden. The participants' stories suggest that we cannot have one without the other when we experience giving back. In the end, each of these aspects of the experience helps to balance the other.

It Was Never About Us: Giving Back Is About Building and Nurturing Relationships

Relationships were at the heart of the participants' efforts to give back. They became inspired to give back through the nurturing relationships that they shared with others. These others were often family members and mentors who cared for and supported them in various ways. The participants hoped to give back to honor these relationships. Sometimes they did so by developing new relationships and becoming mentors themselves. The work to give back itself was often done through relationship building and relationship restoration.

Many participants began their work cognizant about how they would build the healthiest relationships they could with those whom they intended to serve. They often realized that, without tending to these relationships, their work might be all for naught. Allison, for example, placed great value in the longitudinal relationships she built with patients and their families through regular visits:

> I think it's just really nice when during the first year of life, you see the pediatrician so much during that time. Especially new parents, being able to reassure them and make them feel like they're being good parents and help them foresee things, like developmentally what their kids are going to be doing and how to prevent injuries from happening.

From this, it seemed that Allison knew that, while the medical knowledge she could impart to patients and their families was important, it was perhaps just as important for her to instill in them the confidence that they would need to foster healthy home environments. She looked forward to getting to know children and their families along these journeys.

The participants also discussed how partnerships with others who had similar interests could impact their work to give back. Such partnerships allowed for resources to be maximized in addressing shared interests. These resources included funding, manpower, and even knowledge. Nikki, for example, emphasized the value of sharing knowledge among tribes. One of the main ways she aimed to give back was through connecting people from different tribes and jurisdictions with one another:

> I'm trying to connect people, and I'm trying to learn about as many of our members and courts as possible, because the more I know about what they're doing, the better I can assess the needs of somebody who comes to me and says, "I'm having this problem. How can you help me?" . . . Sometimes it helps to just introduce people to each other and to make those connections.

Nikki's intent was that, through these connections, tribes could share their best practices with one another. Although best practices could not be easily duplicated from one tribal setting into another, when healthy intertribal relationships were in place, tribes could still glean ideas from one another and ask one another questions. Nikki hoped that people would be able to think about how best practices in another tribe could potentially be adapted for their own tribes in ways that honored their own traditions and core values.

The participants additionally discussed efforts to foster healthy intergenerational relationships within their communities. The participants felt that they owed much of what they had in their lives, from basic needs to their sense of values and understandings of the world, to their elders and their ancestors. This being the case, elders and ancestors often provided participants with their original inspiration to give back. This was especially the case for Troy Anderson, who is a member of the Coquille nation and serves as a linguist for his tribe. He first embarked on learning his mother tongue, Miluk, with little inkling of what the journey would entail. Because no one in his tribe spoke Miluk any longer, he had to search far and wide for materials that could provide the foundations for relearning and rebuilding the language. He reached a turning point in his journey when he unexpectedly happened upon recordings of his great-great-grandmother Lolly Metcalf speaking the language. Reflecting on the moment he first heard his Grandma Lolly's voice, Troy said,

> That was the first time that I really felt I was giving back. It was kind of the serendipity of finding this tape. Me to get that tape and then playing that tape caused all these other stories to happen.

In many ways, finding his great-great-grandmother drove Troy to continue in his work restoring Miluk throughout his life. He hoped to honor her by finding ways to help the language survive for future generations.

Indeed, feeling supported by past generations, the participants gave back so that future generations could have the means to thrive. Tesia summed up the significance and vitality of intergenerational relationships through describing a traditional CPN philosophy concerning seven generations:

> Seven generations ago, some of my ancestors did something that created a chain of events that led to me being here today doing this. That's the kind of thing that makes me personally responsible for what I'm doing now. . . . Somebody did something and ensured that . . . these traditions and cultures, this tribal community exists. So how dare I [laugh] not do something to ensure that for someone else seven generations from now?

Relationships, in many ways, were at the heart of giving back. It was because of their awareness and appreciation of relationships that the participants realized they had received a number of gifts and privileges in their own lives. It was because of their awareness and appreciation of relationships that they further recognized their responsibility to make their communities stronger through giving of themselves. It was relationships that drew the participants in communion with their fellow men and women, their ancestors, and their progeny to come. The participants could not be where they were if it were not for their relationships. Thus, caring for their relationships and others' relationships became an essential component of their experiences with giving back.

Staying Grounded: Giving Back Involves Considerations of Place

Place mattered in the participants' journeys to give back, albeit in complex ways. The participants' understandings of self and community were situated by place. Thus, place impacted what relationships were important to them in their work and what these relationships looked like. Place also impacted the meaning that the participants made of their efforts to give back.

Place as a Foundation for Communal Identity

The participants felt strongly connected to their ancestral homelands and/or to where their peoples had been able to establish their tribal governments. In these places, they felt grounded by their peoples' relationships to nature and by their sense of cultural knowledge, which was often place based. Leilani, for example, described the relationship she shared with place:

> My grandmother, my grandfather, and my dad always taught me to take care of the land; care for ʻāina [land, that which feeds], and it

> will care for community. Community will care for family. Family will care for the individual. And then the cycle will continue.

Leilani's relationship with ʻāina was one of reciprocal care. While she felt a responsibility to the land, she felt that in return it would nourish her, her family, and her community. ʻĀina was a beloved relative, part of a cycle of giving back.

Moving Back Home

Perhaps because of the relationships that they shared with these places, most of the participants discussed being interested in working within their home communities at some point. For those who were able to find work in their home communities, the experience was both challenging and rewarding. Both Tesia and Keʻōpū, for example, were met with questions as to why, if they were well educated, they would decide to return home to develop their careers. Behind such questions was the assumption that educational success would lead Native college graduates to move into and stay in major metropolitan cities. In the face of such questions, however, Tesia found confidence in her decision to move back home by focusing on the value of her hometown of Shawnee. For Tesia, what was valuable in Shawnee was her people. She spoke of how, as she became more confident about the difference she was making in the CPN, she also felt more confident in combating questions regarding her return home. Keʻōpū seemed to have had a somewhat similar experience. As she became more settled in her life back in Hawaiʻi, she knew that she was where she should be. On this, Keʻōpū remarked, "You feel when you come home, especially the places that you're raised in, you feel this hug, this metaphorical hug. Moving home was, I always say, probably the best decision I ever made." In the end, for these women, there was something about being home that felt just right.

Feeling Grounded While Remaining Away from Home

Unfortunately, the participants all became separated from their home communities for at least some part of their journeys toward giving back. For many of the participants, college drew them away from home for the first time. This separation made for difficult transitions at times. T voiced how challenging this could be as she reflected on what advice she would give to Native youth who were interested in giving back. "I [will] definitely tell them that going to college away from your family is going to be [a] sacrifice," she said. Then she continued, "I've missed cousin's weddings, births. I missed a lot. But to me it was worth it because I knew I was doing something positive." Through her use of the word *sacrifice* here, T suggested that

attending college away from home was not just about gaining something. There was something to be missed as well in separating oneself from home.

While some participants were able to return home eventually, others were not. Often, participants' career opportunities led them elsewhere. Still, as they realized that they might remain away from home indefinitely, they tried to find other paths through which they could give back. On that, Nikki stated, "With that option [to return to my tribe to work] not being there, the next best option is to be a supportive member of just the [Native] community at large." Even as she remained away from Paiute land, Nikki knew that she still had something that she could give to her community. Perhaps because she had developed strong connections with people from diverse Native nations through her college and professional experiences, Nikki felt good about what she could contribute broadly to Indian country through her work with the National American Indian Court Judges Association. She knew that as she made Indian country better, she might still impact her home community.

Similarly, most of the participants who remained away from their home communities hoped to give back to Indigenous peoples broadly through their work. Jarrid hoped to broaden college access for Native students across the country. Genny Giaccardo, who is of the Pueblo of San Felipe and acts as an advisor for tribal relations for the federal government, strove to improve the lines of communication between the U.S. federal government and tribal governments. Uncle Robert tried to help create sustainable economic engines with and in impoverished and Indigenous communities across the globe. Leilani worked to make higher education institutions more comfortable places for all Indigenous and minoritized students.

While they were away from home, the participants tried to stay grounded and developed new senses of place and community. Jarrid, for example, talked about how he tried to remain grounded especially through making concerted efforts to visit his family in Upstate New York and his wife's family in Hawai'i periodically. Making these trips allowed him and his wife and, perhaps more importantly, their children opportunities to (re)connect with cultural identities that were tied to these places. Other participants expressed the importance of building new senses of home away from home through the development of fictive kin relationships. Nikki, for example, spoke about how the friendships that she had developed through involvement in Native communities through her undergraduate and law school programs were vital to her survival. On this note, she stated,

> My definition of family includes a lot of my best friends that I made in college and law school. Even professionally, afterwards, those people that we stayed very close with. So I feel like that community at large gave me the support that I needed to thrive.

Individuals, families, communities, and the land were inextricably linked and were responsible to one another. Place, sometimes in complicated ways, helped the participants to make sense of their journeys and what they were meant to do to give back.

Breathing Life Into Legacies: Giving Back Is Intended to Ensure Community Survivance

The participants were very mindful of the impacts of their work. Giving back was not just about making the world a better place today. Rather, giving back was about being part of a cycle. It involved taking and making use of one's gifts, then passing along the products of that work to the next generation. Alluding to this, Leilani reflected on her efforts to give back:

> "What am I doing to be a good ancestor?" I keep that in my mind. "Is this a way for me to be a good ancestor?" Constantly, in the work that I'm doing. "Is this part of the legacy that I want to leave?" It is.

As Leilani put it, giving back involved honoring one's ancestors by becoming a good ancestor to others. It was about breathing life into a legacy that would serve future generations well. Ultimately, giving back was about ensuring community survivance.

The participants set out on their journeys to give back in the wake of colonization. It was due to colonization that they saw their communities face a number of challenges, from negative self-imagery to poverty, from educational disparities to epidemics. Thus, the participants gave back aspiring to equip their communities to thrive despite these challenges, to empower their communities to turn back the tides of colonization. They took myriad approaches to accomplishing this goal, from tending to physical needs in Native communities to caring for emotional and political issues that affect the cohesiveness of Native communities.

Seeing the impacts of colonization, the participants felt that they had a vested interest in ensuring the survivance of their peoples through giving back. They felt that this survivance should be driven primarily from within their own communities. To this end, Ke'ōpū said,

> If we're [Hawaiians] not doing this work [related to protecting and enacting Hawaiian sovereignty], then nobody else will. I remember having that feeling in law school that no one is looking out for us. They [in the broader society] say they're looking out for us, but when it comes down to the day-to-day, who's going to care if our people are getting the right kind of health care? Who's going to care if our people are able to complete their education? Nobody's going to care.

Keʻōpū had witnessed Hawaiians being marginalized and overlooked by society at large. So she believed that Hawaiians had to stand up for their nation because they had the heart for it.

Through giving back, the participants set out to contribute to different aspects of their communities' survivance. Some tended to various physical needs in their communities. Allison sought to deliver quality health care to families in her community. She questioned why Native peoples were at higher risk for problems like obesity, depression, and suicide and wanted to work toward ameliorating such issues on a microlevel through direct patient care and on a macrolevel through advocacy. Uncle Robert worked to codevelop technologies that could serve a variety of basic needs in impoverished communities. These technologies included items like water filtration systems and low-emitting brick-firing kilns. T helped victims of domestic violence to escape being trapped in abusive relationships. She offered counseling and provided them with resources that would empower them to become financially independent. Genny acted as a communicative bridge between the federal government and tribal governments so that tribal governments could successfully obtain funding to meet the needs of their peoples. And Noa researched cropping systems that could support agricultural workers and provide better food production. Through these efforts, participants helped to ensure improvement in the bodily, day-to-day lives of their community members. They hoped, though, that the fruits of their labor would be long lasting, that their people would progress and continue to develop positive habits and live healthfully.

Some participants tended to other issues, often emotional and political, that impacted the cohesiveness of their communities. Jarrid and Leilani worked to expand opportunities and improve outcomes for Native peoples in higher education. Tesia helped to (re)connect CPN youth to CPN traditions as well as to various educational resources. All three participants desired to prepare future generations of leaders for their communities and/or the Native community at large. Troy made great efforts to revive the Miluk language. He believed that knowledge of the language could help Coquille tribal members better understand what made them a people. Keʻōpū sought to provide a medium for the communication of Hawaiian success stories through *Mana* magazine and to contribute to building structures that would allow for Hawaiian self-governance with the Office of Hawaiian Affairs. Last but not least, Nikki worked to bolster tribal justice systems through training, networking, and advocacy. She felt that as tribal judges and justice personnel incorporate traditional peacemaking practices into their justice systems, they would be able to work toward restoring harmony among their nations. Through their body of work, these participants fortified the bonds of their communities. They ensured the survivance of their communities through putting pieces in place that would help individuals band together as a people.

Conclusions and Implications

In the end, I liken each of the themes uncovered through this research to stars. The light of each star streams outward and blends together at the edges. For instance, concepts of worldview might be central to the first theme, but they are continually referred to in other themes. Additionally, relationships might be the focus of the fourth theme, but the vitality of relationships can be seen in all other themes as well. Relationships are what led the participants to envision where they are at once privileged and responsible, for instance. It is thus important not to understand the themes from this research in isolation. Instead, I offer the meaning structure developed through this work as a constellation, such that the full beauty of giving back cannot be fathomed without attention to how its stars complement one another. As I come from a people who navigated the vast Pacific by the stars, I ask myself at the conclusion of this research what direction this constellation of giving back can provide to the field of higher education.

Reconnecting to the Literature

While the literature suggests that Native students with various academic backgrounds might be interested in and/or prepared to give back to Native communities (Bosse et al., 2011; Drywater-Whitekiller, 2010), there are no further examples of what this might look like. With regard to the limited nature of this discussion, Keene (2016) stated,

> We press rhetoric and ideals of nation building, sovereignty, and self-determination, and see education as the means to accomplish that goal—yet we have not set up the structures to show students the multitude of forms that can take, or provide the support to bring the students back home and reintegrate them into the community.

This study fills this gap in the literature by bringing together the stories of Native college graduates who have chosen to give back to Native communities in myriad ways. Indeed, the participants in this study have been trained in a broad array of academic disciplines, from sustainability to community planning, from medicine to higher education. In this way, this study advances the idea that Native peoples can engage in giving back in countless ways. It suggests that intent, more than form, may define giving back.

Ultimately, from the perspective of the Native college graduates who participated in this study, giving back was about ensuring community survivance. Vizenor (2008) defined Native survivance as "an active sense of presence over absence, deracination, and oblivion" (p. 1). Kroeber (2008) further explained that while *survival* hearkens to a marginal existence in the wake of catastrophe, *survivance* is oriented toward "renewal and continuity into the future" (p. 25). Indeed, the participants were concerned with more than the mere survival of their communities.

All of the participants were concerned with giving back to their communities so that they would be well equipped to choose their own ways and means of moving forward into the future. In other words, to the participants, giving back for community survivance was not about preserving a static community identity. Rather, giving back was about using all available tools to thrive in a contemporary world with respect to ancestral wisdom and values. In this way, the participants seemed comfortable with a kind of Native survivance that offered

> modes of personal and social renewal attained through welcoming unpredictable cultural reorientations. These reorientations promise radically to transform current native life without requiring abandonment of the enduring value of their precontact cultural successes. (Kroeber, 2008, p. 25)

The participants believed that their education provided them with tools that could be used for carving out this survivance. In this, they embraced the idea that, in contemporary society, facility with multiple forms of knowledge could be important to Native nations (Champagne, 2004). They believed that there was something to be gained from blending knowledges. In this, they seemed to feel comfortable with epistemological pluralism, which Andreotti, Ahenakew, and Cooper (2011) described as the sometimes complementary, sometimes tension-filled coexistence of multiple forms of knowledge. They also seemed to engage in transculturative processes, where knowledge from the dominant society is adopted and adapted to meet the needs of marginalized peoples in resistant ways (Pratt, 1992). In this, the findings of this research highlight how Native college students and graduates utilize blended knowledge toward meeting community needs. Native college graduates experience both triumphs and challenges in their efforts toward doing this.

Implications for Practice

While statistics may indicate that Native students enroll in and graduate from college at lower rates than students from other racial and ethnic populations (Brayboy et al., 2012; Kamehameha Schools, 2014), this study presents the stories of Native men and women who have achieved great postsecondary success not only in terms of the academy but also on their own terms. The participants both completed their college degrees and managed to fulfill valued roles and responsibilities through giving back to their communities. In their eyes, the former could not have come at the expense of the latter. In this light, if higher education institutions are interested in leveling postsecondary educational gaps, they should begin by broadening their limited conceptions of what constitutes success. They should listen to

their diverse student bodies and the communities that they represent on how they define success for themselves.

If higher education institutions understand giving back to be a strength among Native peoples, they should recognize it as a form of merit alongside other predominantly used indicators of academic merit, such as grade point averages and test scores. Guinier (2005), for example, argued that, as college graduates of color work to benefit communities of color and low-income communities, they contribute to greater societal equity and thus exhibit what Guinier called their democratic merit. She suggested that as institutions choose to invest in people who show potential for democratic merit, they invest in a more just society. In a similar way, I propose that Native college graduates who choose to give back to Native communities exhibit their nation-building merit. If institutions were to choose to invest in those who display nation-building merit, they would also invest in decolonization and the betterment of Native nations.

If higher education institutions recognize giving back as a positive post-secondary outcome, they must put resources into empowering Native students to give back. Since giving back is about building and nurturing relationships, doing this would involve tending to the relational well-being of Native students. Higher education institutions should support students in maintaining connections with their families and home communities as well as in establishing connections with new communities, both on and off campus. Through service-learning courses, for example, students could connect coursework with hands-on experiences in local communities. Summer externship funding could also give Native students opportunities to work for and in nonlocal Native nations when it would otherwise be financially burdensome for students and/or Native nations with fewer financial resources. On campus, carving out spaces for Native student communities and Native studies programs could allow Native peers to meet with one another in both casual and semiformal ways, such as through Native peer-advising networks (Shotton, Oosahwe, & Cintrón, 2007). Higher education institutions could also provide means for students to develop relationships with Native and other faculty and staff, such as through formal advising but also through less formal communications. Furthermore, faculty and staff should have ongoing support in developing cultural competency.

Implications for Research

Though this study provides deep insight into the experience of giving back, there is still much more that we could learn. Further research could be done to consider what potential nation-building merit could look like among Native college applicants as well as how college admissions personnel could consider nation-building merit in their admissions decisions. Additional research is needed to explore how specific college curricula,

programs, or initiatives could promote the culture of giving back among Native students. Perhaps most importantly, research could also be done with Native nations that considers how they define postsecondary success for themselves and their peoples. This research could also explore what knowledge, skills, or networks gained through college attendance would be beneficial to Native nations from the perspective of their leaders and/ or elders. Such knowledge could be vital to informing future practices that foster giving back in higher education. While the intention would not be to delimit understandings of how Native college students could seek to give back, the perspectives of Native nations could help guide institutions of higher education as they develop supports for Native college graduates in their visioning and preparation for giving back.

Closing Thoughts

In the end, my aim is for the findings from this study to be useful to Native students, Native communities, and institutions of higher education. This study highlights giving back as something of value, a positive outcome of higher education participation. Where my conceptual framework called me to pay attention to the connections between higher education, self-determination, nation building, and sovereignty, this study has illustrated what these connections could look like both through the stories of particular Native college graduates and through their shared meaning structure of giving back.

Higher education offers knowledge, skills, and networks that could be used to address a broad range of needs and interests in Native nations. However, Native students themselves must forge the connections between these goods of higher education and the needs of their communities through giving back. In this way, Native college graduates may act as conduits for their communities to achieve self-determination and sovereignty. They must decide what bases of knowledge, skills, and networks to build through their postsecondary education. Then, they must further decide how to apply these elements in the interest of their peoples.

Akoto (as cited in Brayboy et al., 2012) defined nation-building as "the conscious and focused application of [Indigenous] people's collective resources, energies, and knowledge to the task of liberating and developing the psychic and physical space that is identified as [their] own" (p. 12). It is through engaging in nation-building processes that Native peoples actualize their self-determined visions of nationhood and sovereignty. From this perspective, the findings of this study show that giving back is nation building. Cornell and Kalt (1998) proposed that, through nation-building processes, Native peoples must engage in comprehensive problem solving to develop nations in which people will want to invest a variety of assets, including financial capital, time, energy, ideas, skills, and goodwill. Indeed, the

Native college graduates in this study have invested in their nations and in the Native community at large in diverse ways. They have worked tirelessly too to contribute to several distinct visions of what sovereignty might look like or entail, from the rights that are conferred through federal recognition, to the freedom to pursue economic development, to the will to preserve cultural traditions and ways of life (Brayboy et al., 2012; Coffey & Tsosie, 2001; Cornell & Kalt, 1998; Goodyear-Ka'ōpua, 2014).

This new knowledge regarding giving back should be used to encourage Native participation in higher education. It should inform policies and practices related to Native enrollment and attainment in college. In this way, knowledge of giving back could be used to shape better, more relevant college experiences for Native students and ultimately to lead to increased self-determination and sovereignty across Native nations.

Though this stage of my research journey may be over, I envision myself now at the beginning of a new voyage. How will I fulfill my own kuleana to give back? How will this knowledge of giving back become useful? How will it guide our work in making higher education a better place for Indigenous peoples and others? Reflecting on these questions, I leave with the mana'o ("thoughts and ideas") of master navigator Kālepa Baybayan:

> The voyage is a testament to the success of our oceanic ancestors in the face of enormous adversity. It is about the universal quest for a better life, the marriage of will and knowledge, the spirit and flame of new hope. Like our mariner ancestors, we will continue to leave the safety of distant shores, and in doing so, we will discover the stars. (Polynesian Voyaging Society, 2015, n.p.)

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Notes

[1]Although I primarily follow the style guidelines of the American Psychological Association in this article, I make some important exceptions. One exception is my occasional use of a narrative I/we, which connotes an inseparability of the self from community that is characteristic of Indigenous worldviews (Minthorn, 2018).

[2]Following the example of Minthorn (2018), I also purposely do not italicize Indigenous words, in an effort not to mark them as foreign.

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